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Statement submitted by OceanCare, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is being issued without formal editing.

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Statement

The future of humanity is linked to healthy oceans. Over fishing, chemical and noise pollution are already undermining marine biodiversity and threatening food security for millions of people. These impacts are compounded by climate change and ocean acidification.

Transitioning to the sustainable development goals should mean conscious action, and decisions in the present to limit harm in the future.

By its very nature, the petroleum exploration industry works against this goal. Greenhouse gas emissions contained in present estimates of global fossil fuel reserves are already three times higher than can be used if global temperatures are not to exceed 2 degrees centigrade. Yet, the petroleum exploration industry ambition is to increase fossil fuel use into the future.

Facilitating this industry to explore for new reserves in offshore areas has an even more profound impact because it harms the present as well. Offshore petroleum exploration is a major ocean noise producer.

For more than a decade OceanCare has raised concern about ocean noise pollution through intergovernmental meetings, urging governments and the United Nations to take action to reduce ocean noise.

In some areas ocean noise levels, from petroleum exploration, shipping and high intensity military sonar, have doubled every decade for the past 60 years, posing significant threat to marine life and ecosystems. Ocean noise is impacting at least 55 marine species including 20 commercially valuable species, including perch, snapper, cod, haddock and bluefin tuna. Studies show that intense noise generated by offshore petroleum exploration can decrease commercial fish catch rates by 80 percent. Catch rates do not readily recover from these surveys. This has critical socioeconomic repercussions on fisheries, fisher people, the global food supply and undermines global marine biodiversity.

The United Nations General Assembly has acknowledged this through the annual resolution on sustainable fisheries and has encouraged the Food and Agricultural Organisation to investigate the link between ocean noise, decreased catch rates and socioeconomic impacts.

Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity recently agreed to the need to conduct thorough and detailed environmental impact assessments before approving marine noise generating activities. (Decision XII/23).

Transitioning to the sustainable development goals will take informed, coordinated and conscious decisions to limit harm. All agencies can be responsive to the need for coordinated and responsive action. All governments can consciously implement thorough environmental impact assessments as a prerequisite before approving any offshore noise industries to proceed. Transparently comparing the risks of fossil fuel development to renewable energy infrastructure should make decisions clear.